DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 046 281 FL 002 059

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TITLE Language Education: A Unitary Experience.
INSTITUTION Virginia Modern Foreign Language Association.
PUB DATE 30 Oct 70
NOTE 31p.; Speech presented at the Modern Foreign Language Association of Virginia Conference, Richmond, Va., October 30, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Tests, Aptitude Tests, *College Freshmen, College Students, Educational Trends, Evaluation Criteria, *Grades (Scholastic), *Language Instruction, Language Proficiency, Language Tests, *Modern Languages, National Competency Tests, Objective Tests, Performance Criteria, Secondary Schools, Second Language Learning, *Standardized Tests, Student Motivation

ABSTRACT

This address evaluates standardized language test results of students at the College of William and Mary in terms of their class grades and continuity of enrollment in language programs. Implications of the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) test scores reflecting actual linguistic proficiency and secondary school training are examined extensively. Reasons for studying foreign languages are discussed with emphasis on recent trends in enrollment, particularly the dropout rate at the college level, throughout the country. Tables of comparative test scores and correlative final grade averages are included. (RL)

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LANGUAGE EDUCATION --- A UNITARY EXPERIENCE

Robert A. Johnston

I suppose no speaker, despite his protestations to the contrary, ever really feels that his introduction does him full credit. In my case, I doubly feel that you may not fully appreciate my credentials for speaking to you this morning. For example, I speak no foreign language---ancient or modern---nor can I understand one if it is spoken to me. I have not been in a language classroom (except to count the number of chairs) in nearly 20 years. I have never taken a methods course in foreign language teaching and about the only thing I know about a language laboratory is that it is very expensive to build. This was even more surprising to me when I found out that it didn't contain a single Bunsen burner or even a T-maze for running rats. I emphasize all this so that you can fully appreciate how clever Dr. Oustinoff was to invite me and how clever all of you were to elect him president.

You may be thinking that things are not as bad as they seem. Maybe it's a good idea to invite an "outsider" every hundred years or so who has no bias with respect to foreign language to sort of view the field objectively from "without" --- like "without" knowing what he's talking about

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so if he says anything uncomplimentary it's because he doesn't know what he's talking about. Unfortunately, however, I have a bias so I can't even qualify on the grounds of objectivity.

I had better tell you what my bias is, however, so that you can better evaluate what I've been doing for the last year or so and particularly for the last two months, and better evaluate what I intend to tell you about this morning.

I believe that any person in this day and age who wants to consider himself educated in the classical or liberal sense should be able to hold a conversation in a foreign language at least on a social level, should be at least able to read a foreign newspaper or popular magazine, should know something of the type of government of that country, its history and geography and its culture, including its classical literature, and its life style. I think there are good, relevant and humanistic reasons for this which have nothing to do with "Sputnik" and scientific technology or a better knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary.

I certainly don't intend to review all of these reasons with you because you know them better than I do. None of my reasons are new or original. If you will bear with me for a moment, however, I will quote briefly from a recent

report of a special committee at the College of William and Mary on "The Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Calendar" on which I served. The report says:

> There are impressive arguments for the values of the study of foreign languages. One of the forms of ignorance from which a liberal education should liberate a person is surely cultural parochialism. The study of a culture other than one's own, whether contemporary or of the past, is a powerful means of accomplishing such a liberation. And mastery of its language is the only key that unlocks fully the riches of another culture. The great human treasures of literature and thought in the ancient languages of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Sanskrit as well as in modern languages like French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese, are only partially accessible to those who must approach them through translation.
>
> The study of language in itself can be a liberating experience. To understand the idiomatic patterns of thought in a language other than one's own can free the mind from some of the most pernicious prejudices that Bacon called "Idols of the Tribe."

There are also immediate practical values in the study of languages. Both the ancient and the modern foreign languages are important tools of scholarship in various fields of study. In today's cosmopolitan world, knowledge of other living cultures and their languages is increasingly valuable both from the point of view of society and of many individuals. These cultures and languages, not only European but perhaps even more Asiatic, Arabic, and African, need study for reasons of cultural understanding in an ever more interdependent world. Command of a foreign language is becoming increasingly more useful in many businesses and for many individuals in personal travel.

I have a further bias. I think we have been singularly unsuccessful in this country in getting this message across to the vast majority of the population, students, parents, and educators. Certainly at the College of William and Mary, a very small percentage of the student body elects to take language courses beyond the level required and for 40% of our entering freshmen in the last two years this is the second year or intermediate level of foreign language. The remaining 60%, with the exception of about 40 hardy souls each year who have their hearts set on being able to come to these meetings, take either intermediate grammar

and composition or a one-year survey of literature and then retire from the fray. In my humble opinion gleaned from discussion with these students as seniors, they do not have the language competence I could wish they would have, nor---somewhat surprisingly to me---that they wish they had.

Moreover, the stiuation appears on the verge of getting worse. I would like to return to the curriculum report that I quoted from earlier to finish reading that particular section on foreign language:

> For all these reasons we would emphasize and encourage the study of languages. We do so in our "guidelines." But we do not find in any or all of the arguments for the value of language study any compelling reason to require that all students at William and Mary must study a language in college. No argument convinces us that language study is the only way to accomplish the ends proposed or that the ends are essential for all individuals.
>
> We do believe, however, that it is reasonable to expect any candidate for a degree from William and Mary to base his decision as to whether foreign language study is valuable for him on some first-hand experience. How much and what kind of experience provides a sufficient basis for decision is of course a moot point. We believe that four years of study

in school, or four semesters in college, is a reasonable basis. We therefore propose that unless a student presents at least four entrance credits in a single ancient or modern foreign language, he must successfully complete a fourth semester course (202 or above) in a language in college. At this point, he has adequate grounds for making his own decision as to whether he should continue this study or not.

While I do not agree with this conclusion, I am forced to admit that students are constantly faced with selecting from the vast mass of human knowledge those few things they will have time to study in depth and that current language courses may not be the best way to accomplish the goals of language study.

Nonetheless, what this means, at William and Mary at least, is that in the future nearly 40% of our entering students may take no language at all on the college level and the other 60% will go no further than the intermediate level. Before you decide that William and Mary has become simply a non-humanistic, anti-liberal, if not anti-intellectual, institution of higher learning, let me point out that curriculum reform at the college level is very much in style throughout

the country and that William and Mary's requirement in this area demands more language training than the average college requires. Add to this the fact that graduate schools are steadily reducing and even eliminating the language requirements for graduate degrees, and one must be struck by the fact that the extrinsic reasons for pursuing the study of language in our secondary schools and colleges are slowly but surely being removed from consideration. In my view, the situation is critical and language departments on both high school and college levels will have to redouble their efforts to convince students of the value of language training for its own sake and to package their material attractively enough to "lure," if you will, students to their field. In reference to our new requirements at William and Mary, one faculty member in a department having no required courses and who, incidently, feels much the way I do about language study, said that now the language department will have to live by its wits as we have had to do all these years and maybe it's a good thing for the students and the language program.

This is not to suggest that I am unaware that modern language teachers have been concerned with the problems of the effectiveness of language training for many years and that this concern was reflected in the Coleman Report on the Teaching of Modern Foreign Language in the United States as early as 1929. I am also aware that at the high school level at least, language programs have undergone drastic

revision in the last twenty years and that the old two year program in high school language study has been replaced by a four year program designed to provide a comprehensive program of language study in the high school, so that the student going to college is prepared to do advanced level work in languages. I am also aware that this program is one in which the student receives exposure to all the basic language skills---aural, oral, reading and writing. In fact, it is the effectiveness of this new program that I have been looking at during the last two months.

I want to emphasize at the outset that these findings I will report to you are quite preliminary and based on students at only one college---the College of William and Mary. Moreover, they represent only those students who entered the College in 1968 and 1969 although some of the results have been checked for those students entering this fall, that is 1970. I should also say that the students have been rather highly selected for admission to William and Mary and as a result I suspect they are more likely to have had three or four years of language study in secondary school than the average student. Slide 1 This selectivity is reflected in the average SAT verbal score of our students compared with the National average. I suspect that some of you at least may be surprised by the fact that the National average SAT score is as low as it is. You are used to thinking of average College Board scores being 500 with a nice normal distribution and a

standard deviation of 100. While it's true that this was the basis of the original raw score transformations, the actual stiuation varies from year to year and test to test. The averages I am presenting are the averages actually obtained nationally by seniors in high school taking the various tests. Those of you who are surprised now will find more surprising things in store as I go along.

SLIDE I

Returning to slide one, you will notice that despite the fact that SAT verbal average for William and Mary students is significantly (150 points) above the national average, their average language achievement test scores shown on the right hand side of this slide do not reflect this increased ability.

SLIDE II

Slide II shows these results broken down according to the number of years a student has studied a language in high school and as you see the trend is there in all three categories although things begin to look better in the four year group.

This is a rather surprising finding and does not reflect a national trend. You will note that these averages remain stable over the three year period and are apparently a real characteristic of our student population.

SLIDE III

Slide III shows the same comparisons broken down by language so that each of you may look for solace in the

results for your particular field. I doubt that you will find much comfort if you are hoping that in your language at least, high achievement test scores are the rule. The statisticians at the College Board tell me that this lack of correspondence between SAT verbal and achievement scores is quite unusual and that nationally, high SAT scores are associated with higher than average langauge achievement scores.

In attempting to explain these results, one possibility which immediately suggests itself is that the CEEB achievement tests may not be measuring what is being taught in Virginia high schools (70% of William and Mary's freshman class each year is made up of graduates of Virginia high schools). If in fact a majority of language programs in Virginia high schools are following a pattern of teaching aural-oral skills in the first two years and grammar and vocabulary in the third and fourth years, it seems quite possible that very bright students who learn their lessons well will still not do well on achievement tests which call for a knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, unless they have pursued that language for three or preferably four years. Only 39% of our freshman classes in the last three years have had four or more years of language and 26% have had only two years of language study despite the fact that they are among the brighter and more capable college bound students in the high schools.

I would readily admit that gaining high scores on the CEEB achievement tests is a poor argument for encouraging students to pursue their high school language study through four years unless, of course, it can be shown that scores on these tests are directly related to something of more tangible value like college admission or even success in college language courses or, best of all, skill in the use of a language. I should point out, however, that the CEEB tests have been modified this year to include a supplemental listening test designed to tap the aural-oral areas. While no one that I know of is very sure what the results of this modification will be in terms of predicting success in college language courses, the new test will certainly have greater face validity for those students whose language study has been primarily in aural-oral skills and may improve the standing of Virginia students vis-a-vis the national average.

Let me turn now to a consideration of what I've really been looking at---namely, what happens to these students when they come to college. The answer is rather discouraging in that far too many of them simply ignore their high school language training and start a new language in college. This is particularly true of those students with two years of language in high school.

SLIDE IV

It is only in the group that has had four or more years of high school language that a substantial majority elect to

continue that same language in college and, as you can see, even here more than one-fifth of these students opt out. What these results suggest is that nearly half of the students going to college simply waste the language study they've had in high school---study that was designed to prepare them for higher level language study in college so that the two phases of this program fitted together would provide a unitary foreign language experience that would let them achieve the level of language competence we have set as our goal. These students behave as though they do not perceive a continuity between their high school and college language courses. Having studied one language in high school they see no loss in beginning another in College. In fact, some may see it as a good thing because they now will "know" two languages. What they will not have, however, is competence in either.

To put these figures in context, I will have to outline briefly the present language requirement at William and Mary as it has been for these students. A student with two years of language in high school (grades 9-12) may not take the first year or elementary college course for credit and must take four semesters at the college level. A student with three years of language in high school cannot take the first semester of intermediate language for credit and must take three semesters at the college level. The four year student must start above the intermediate level and take two semesters of the language. A student beginning a new language in college

must take two years, that is through the intermediate level. We require students to take the CEEB achievement tests in language for placement purposes, but placement is simply advisory. We may advise a student with very low scores to audit a course before beginning to meet his requirements (he has, of course, the option of beginning a new language), or we may advise a student with very high scores to begin beyond the normal placement based on years of study and thereby reduce his college language requirement.

In practice we have adopted a score of 400 as our worry point and have advised students with scores below this to consider auditing a course or starting a new language. In fact, the great majority of students below this point have elected to do the latter. If we look at the left side of Slide V it becomes apparent that a substantial proportion of these students we worry about can actually do well by continuing in their language and in fact the percentage failing at the two year level is essentially the same as the percentage who start a new language and fail.

SLIDE V

In the future, we will advise more of these students with two years of a language in high school to continue that language in college.

What is particularly distressing is, of the two year group with scores above 400 the high percentage, who start a new language. Slides VI, VII, and VIII show the breakdown of grades

earned for the various levels of achievement test scores and the number of students at each level continuing the same language as opposed to the number of students electing to begin a new language. At the 400-500 level approximately 50% of the students change languages regardless of years of preparation. (SLIDE VI) Above 500 (SLIDES VII AND VIII) the proportions of three and four year students is decidedly in favor of continuing their high school language. The percentage of students earning various grades is remarkably similar regardless of continuance or non-continuance of their high school language.

Overall, nearly 50% of these two year students start a new language or take no language at all in their first year of college, despite the fact that they have all been advised to continue their language. There may be a number of reasons for this. First, many of these students may not understand their College Board Scores. They are used to thinking of 500 as average and since their SAT verbal scores are often above 600, a language achievement score of 450 or even 500 is very discouraging to them. They are not informed that for students with two years of language, an achievement score of 500 is approximately equivalent to a verbal score of 600. Moreover, an average raw score---and I assume that you are all aware that College Board scores are standard scores, converted scores, not raw scores---may represent only 25 items correct

out of nearly 100. The student then may know full well that he didn't get many correct answers and tends to attribute what you tell him are above average scores to luck or "good guessing," not above average knowledge on his part. Therefore, he is afraid to compete in advanced college level courses.

Second, many students may look at language study as simply a requirement to be met and not as a means of accomplishing the goals set down at the beginning of this talk. As such, they see no serious loss in changing their language of study. College advisors may be equally at fault in this, particularly with those students taking Spanish in high school. You may recall from an earlier slide that 77% of those students with two years of Spanish and 56% of those students with three years elect a different language in college. In many cases these students are being told that they need French, German or Russian for graduate or medical schools. With the possible exception of graduate work in certain technical areas, I see no reason why this should be true. With the substantial Spanish speaking population in this country, a physician might well be better off speaking Spanish than any other language. And I see no logical reason for Spanish history, government or art being less meaningful than French or German. I would hope that real efforts would be made to overcome the prejudices that exist in other

disciplines in this regard because the waste in language competence in Spanish is appalling when over one-third of those students with four or more years of Spanish in high school begin elementary courses in a new language in college.

The primary concern with the College Board Achievement test for those of us in college was whether or not high scores could be related to other things. Specifically, how well do they predict success in college language study. The correlation coefficient between achievement test score and grades in college language course is .42 for students who continue in that course. This correlation is essentially the same regardless of the number of years the student has had the language in high school and is just about the same as you usually get in attempting to predict college grades with any test. It well be interesting to see whether or not the predictive level of the new achievement test is any higher. Interestingly enough, the correlation between achievement test scores and grades for students who start a new language is .36, substantially higher than the correlation coefficient of .24 between SAT verbal scores and grades for these same students.

The correlation between SAT verbal scores and grades in language for students who continue is about .22. The multiple correlation using SAT verbal, CEEB achievement scores, and years of study to predict grades is .50, very little improvement over using achievement scores alone.

I think it is important that students in high school be informed of these results. College grades obviously depend primarily on the amount of effort a student invests in his course and are not somehow magically related to scores on a test. A student should not be dissuaded from going on with his high school language in college unless his achievement test scores are well below (100 points) the expected or average score and even then changing languages is no guarantee of success. In this regard, one more set of figures might be worth looking at.

SLIDE IX

This table shows the percentages of students earning various grades in their language courses. The figures on the left are for those continuing their language, those on the right are for those students beginning a new language. Clearly, regardless of language, regardless of the number of years they have studied the language and regardless of their achievement scores, there is no advantage in terms of grades in switching languages. The student will, by and large, do just as well staying with the language he had in high school. In fact, they are slightly more likely to earn a D or an F in a new language.

I think, on the basis of the data I have shown, it is fair to say that at least for those students attending the College of William and Mary, language study is, in far too many cases, not a unitary experience. Far too great a percentage

of students do not continue their language experience in college and, thus, do not reach the level of competence in language or in familiarity with another culture and nation that is our goal. The reasons for this in my opinion are several: (1) Not enough students complete the four year language program in high school and the fewer years they have studied the language in high school the more likely they are to begin a new language in college. (2) Students are not really knowledgeable about the meaning of their College Board Achievement test scores. They don't know the average score and they are discouraged by their poor knowledge of the information asked for in these tests. (3) Students go to college worried about their ability to make good grades and think they have a better chance of making good grades in a new language particularly if they think their achievement test scores are low. (4) Students are not really aware of the educational, cultural, and practical advantages of knowing a language well, and too often simply see language study as a way of meeting certain arbitrary graduation requirements in both high school and college. (5) College advising of freshmen far too often shows a similar poor understanding of achievement test scores and their relationship to success in college language courses and particularly with regard to students who have taken Spanish are too ready to advise them to change languages for entrance to graduate or professional schools.

If, in fact, my diagnosis of the problem is correct, some possible solutions suggest themselves. Students and counselors in high schools must become better educated about the value of language study to a sufficient level of competence that communication among people in its broadest sense is possible. The notion that language skill is only really important for graduate level scholarship is false in every particular. This association might well undertake to prepare a pamphlet for distribution outlining for students these values as well as career opportunities for those with language skill.

Second, language teachers at both the high school and college level, must educate their students as to the meaning of the College Board achievement test scores. This is in no sense an attempt to belittle these tests or their value, but simply to suggest that they are not well understood and are being misused by students. Like any other diagnostic device, they must be fully understood if they are to be useful in their intended purpose.

Third, the value of the four or even five year high school language program needs to be stressed. Students need to understand that it is designed to be a four year program and that if it is not taken in its entirety, important skills will be lost. And in this regard, college language courses must be designed to dovetail with the high school program. At William and Mary, for example, our intermediate courses into which we place students with two years of study in high

school begins with a review of grammar. A student whose courses have focused on aural-oral training doesn't need a review of grammar---he needs a course in grammar.

Finally, I believe college language courses need to be redesigned to bring them in line with what I believe to be the current goals of language study. I stated earlier that few students elect language courses beyond those needed to meet graduation requirements in college. While I have no formal survey results to report, I have talked to a number of students who were potentially good language students who had had four or more years of language in high school who did well in their one year of required language in college, and who stopped taking language courses. Their reasons were remarkably consistent. They were not interested in additional courses in grammar, composition and classical literature. They would have been interested in language courses, taught in the language, on contemporary issues or modern or even popular literature. They were interested in modern government, economic systems, current events, social movements and the like, and wouldn't have minded historical approaches or even writing a paper now and again. Admittedly some of these topics may appear to be outside the competence of language scholars and may even require an interdisciplinary approach, but in many cases it may simply emphasize what language professors should know about and be teaching anyway. I will admit that most departments already have an advanced

conversation course which includes this approach. These have not met the needs or wants of students because they are badly publicized and usually viewed as courses for majors where the competition will be too stiff. Moreover, one course attempting to include all of these topics is not what I am suggesting. Rather, I would like to see a respectable cafeteria of such courses to appeal to those whose interests are in current literature, contemporary government, and the like. I might suggest that for colleges whose calendar includes a January Term, such courses are a natural.

And while we're redesigning, might I suggest that our high school courses could stand some upgrading. I am still disturbed by the fact that the mean language achievement test scores of William and Mary students are <u>at</u> or even <u>below</u> the national average despite verbal SAT scores that are markedly above the national average. This may well suggest that superior students are getting no better than average language instruction. Maybe a track system or greater use of advanced placement programs will provide part of the solution.

I share your concern about the future of language instruction. If more and more colleges follow the practice of reducing or eliminating the language requirements for undergraduate and graduate degrees, and if distinct and serious efforts are not undertaken to educate regarding the value of language instruction, and if this instruction is not designed to meet these goals, the day may well come when language texts will be seen only in museums.

I hope the data I have presented this morning will be provocative. I apologize for its rather preliminary nature and the fact that it deals solely with students attending William and Mary. I suggest, however, that there are those here today who should attempt to extend these findings in a more systematic way. It is sometimes sobering or even disheartening to look closely at the results of one's work; Kenneth Boulding once said, "In the scientific ethic, the scientist is supposed to be delighted if his own theory is proved wrong. In practice this delight is often moderate." Nonetheless, it is from such stuff that progress is made.

TABLE I

	Average SAT Verbal	National Average (Estimate)	Average CEEB Language Score (All Students)	National Average (Estimate)
1968	610	462	522	509
1969	614	461	522	501
1970	609	457	518	Not Published

Comparison of College Board Scores of
William and Mary Students with the National
Average on SAT Verbal and Language Achievement Tests

TABLE II

	William and Mary Average			National Average		
	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years
1968	433	504	606	440	515	571
1969	421	507	600	436	510	563
1970	424	499	596	477		574

Comparison of Average CEEB Language Scores
with the National Average for Students Taking 2, 3, or 4 or more
Years of Language in High School for All Languages

TABLE III

	2 Years in High School		3 Years in High School		4 Years in High School	
	W & M	Nation	W & M	Nation	W & M	Nation
FRENCH						
1968	439	444	505	521	614	578
1969	415	434	498	511	600	561
1970	426		502	486	605	566
SPANISH						
1968	421	428	497	504	588	561
1969	425	427	512	500	606	563
1970	401		494	462	583	577
GERMAN						
1968	437	447	512	521	555	574
1969	439	447	527	519	584	565
1970	458		496	482	570	586

Comparison of Average CEEB Language Scores of
William and Mary Students with the National Average in
French, Spanish, and German

TABLE IV

	Continue Language begun in High School			Do Not Continue Language begun in High School		
	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years
Spanish	23%	44%	66%	77%	56%	34%
German	54%	73%	83%	46%	27%	17%
French	46%	59%	74%	54%	41%	26%
TOTAL	40%	55%	78%	60%	45%	22%

Percentage of Students Who Took
2, 3, and 4 or more Years of Spanish, German, and French
in High School Who Continue That Language in College
Compared to the Percentage Who do not Continue

TABLE V

	Same Language						New Language						
	A	B	C	D	F	Total Number	A	B	C	D	F	No Language	Total Number
2 Years	0%	11%	36%	28%	25%	28	8%	28%	31%	13%	20%	33	119
3 Years	0%	20%	20%	20%	40%	5	0%	12%	44%	21%	23%	5	39
4 Years	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%	1	4

Percentage of Students with Achievement Scores
Below 400 Earning Various Grades in Language Courses in College

TABLE VI

	Same Language						Different Language						
	A	B	C	D	F	Total Number	A	B	C	D	F	No Language	Total Number
2 Years	11%	26%	37%	17%	9%	101	17%	45%	18%	13%	7%	29	98
3 Years	10%	20%	48%	16%	6%	87	22%	20%	34%	7%	17%	25	107
4 Years	0%	13%	45%	19%	23%	31	15%	33%	33%	7%	12%	18	45

Percentage of Students with Achievement Scores From
400-500 Earning Various Grades in Language Courses in College

TABLE VII

	Same Language						Different Language						
	A	B	C	D	F	Total Number	A	B	C	D	F	No Language	Total Number
2 Years	21%	67%	12%	0%	0%	24	64%	21%	15%	0%	0%	5	19
3 Years	26%	56%	25%	2%	1%	104	29%	50%	18%	0%	3%	12	40
4 Years	11%	36%	36%	11%	6%	152	18%	30%	41%	11%	0%	10	37

Percentage of Students with Achievement Scores From
500-600 Earning Vrious Grades in Language Courses in College

TABLE VIII

	Same Language						Different Language						
	A	B	C	D	F	Total Number	A	B	C	D	F	No Language	Total Number
2 Years	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%	2	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0	1
3 Years	27%	48%	20%	5%	0%	44	62%	15%	23%	0%	0%	4	17
4 Years	22%	55%	20%	2%	1%	246	41%	44%	4%	7%	4%	8	35

Percentage of Students with Achievement Scores
Above 600 Earning Various Grades in Language Courses in College

TABLE IX

	Same Language						Different Language					
	A	B	C	D	F	Total Number	A	B	C	D	F	Total Number
2 Years	10%	30%	34%	15%	11%	153	14%	35%	26%	12%	13%	167
3 Years	20%	40%	30%	7%	3%	256	21%	22%	32%	11%	14%	161
4 Years	16%	45%	28%	7%	4%	428	24%	37%	26%	8%	5%	84

Percentage of Students with 2, 3, or 4 or more Years of High School Language Study Earning Various Grades in College Language Course